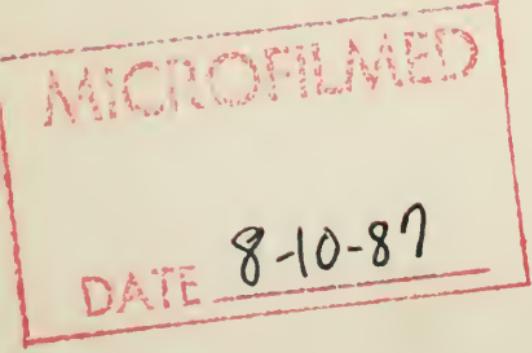


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HOW TO MAKE A RATIONAL FIGHT FOR CHARACTER

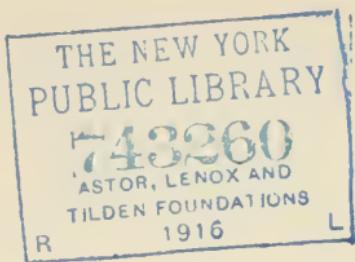
By

PRESIDENT HENRY CHURCHILL KING
Oberlin, Ohio

Twenty-third Thousand



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How to Make a Rational Fight for Character *

In trying to point the way to a rational fight for character I wish to connect all I have to say from the very first with Paul's statement of the outcome of his experience: "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans vii. 24, 25.) For I am not willing that any man should think, even for a moment, that in taking up some of those subsidiary considerations which we need to have in mind in this fight that we have to make in life, I am forgetting the one great way out. That is, let it be clear that there is no attempt here to find some lower substitute for Christ and the great motives of His gospel, but rather posi-

* An address given at the Northfield Student Conference, July 4, 1901.

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tively to state those conditions of all kinds, involved in our very natures, which we need to heed if Christ and the great Christian truths are to have the power with us they ought to have. Any man who believes that God is the Creator of him, body and mind, must also believe that in some true sense God has expressed Himself in this constitution of his being, bodily and mental. God does not mean to ignore the conditions involved in our constitution, nor may we. He has not contradicted Himself in the double revelation of Himself in our natures and in Christ. And the great revelation in Christ will mean most to us, as we heed most carefully the laws of our natures. Not through deliberate disobedience to those laws, but through careful heeding of them are we to be saved. Let us not forget that the laws of this being of ours are laws of God, and, therefore, sacredly to be observed.

In calling careful attention to the constitutional conditions under which we all have to live out our lives, I strive simply

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to answer a question that was brought me some time ago by an old pupil of mine who said, "What are we to do in those poorer moments when the higher motives have lost their appeal?" That is the question.

I. In the first place, it seems to me, that at that lower moment when it looks as if everything were going, it is well for a man to say to himself with all seriousness, "*Everything is now at stake*; it is fight or die." That is the situation. A friend of mine, with the marks of a serious disease upon him, went some time ago to a distinguished specialist in that disease and consulted him. The physician, after going carefully over his case, said to him:—

"I think the disease has not gone so far but that if you will rigorously follow this regimen which I prescribe for you, you can still pull through."

My friend heard him out as to the regimen that he proposed, and said, "Why, doctor, I should simply die if I had to live under that regimen."

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The doctor somewhat gruffly turned upon him and said, "Well, die then."

He had just that one chance. Let a man say to himself, in like manner, in one of those lower moments when he is likely to be engulfed by temptation, "It is fight or die."

It is a very significant thing to-day, in all branches of the Christian Church, that the old shallow talk about sin has ceased, and that there is no branch of the Christian Church that dreams to-day of sweeping multitudes of men without reference to their condition into heaven and the presence of God. Men have come to see that to be saved is to share the life of God, and to share the life of God is to share His character, and *so* to share His blessedness; that God means to save us to character, and that there is, therefore, no way out for any man except by coming into character. Christ means to save us into character, into likeness of character with God. There is no other salvation. In his poorer moments, then, let a man say to himself, "I have simply to let my-

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self go on along this line in which I am now tempted, to have it all over with me, to be lost, absolutely lost." For men have come to see to-day, as they never saw before, that the very utmost that any man by any possible way of thinking could promise anybody in the future life is, that at much greater pains, under greater difficulties, traveling a longer way back to God, he might have opportunity to do just that which now he ought to do. There is no escape in the universe of God but by character. We are shut up to that. Everything, then, is at stake in temptation.

II. Moreover, I think a man ought to ask himself in these lower moments, Why the lower moments? And the second suggestion, therefore, that I have to make is: *Keep yourself persistently at your best.* You have no right to have these lower moments continually breaking in upon your life. Just as in health that is the secret, so here in character it is the secret. You are to guard conditions and strive to keep yourself at your very best.

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Not tolerable health, but superb health, what Emerson called "plus health," must be the aim. I know no way in the matter of bodily health except simply this: to say, I will carefully, conscientiously observe the conditions that will keep me at my very best. In the same way, no man can be certain of character who is willing barely to keep the breath of moral and spiritual life in him, and is not aiming persistently at the very best of which he is capable, and therefore conscientiously observing the conditions that will keep him at his best. It is the subtle gradual deterioration which we are to fear as we fear death. ✓

III. In the third place, we are to *consider the conditions bodily, mental, and of association.*

I. And, first, the *bodily conditions*. I suppose there is hardly a clearer lesson in all modern psychology than the unity of man, mind and body. You may like it or you may not like it; it makes no difference. You are not now a disembodied spirit whatever you may be hereafter;

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you are in the body; you have to get on with your body; and you have to study the conditions of your body, if you expect to make such achievements as you ought to make in your moral and spiritual life. And these conditions are not far off. Let no man think that they are unimportant. The problem of character, what is it? The problem of character is the problem ultimately of self-control. That which distinguishes you from the animal below you, and that which distinguishes you as a sane man from an insane man, is to no small degree this power of self-control. The animal, James says, has a "hair-trigger constitution." What does he mean by that? He means simply that the animal, having an impulse, must yield to it, but as a human being you can hold yourself in check, and not yield to impulse, through attending to some other considerations.

Self-control, I say, is the root virtue of all virtues. It is at the very center of character. But the center of self-control, of course, is will. And the center of

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will, what is that? *Attention.* For if this temptation which now besets you is not to sweep you off your feet, what has got to be done? You must be able in the presence of the temptation to hold your attention fixed upon those higher considerations that ought to prevail, but seem now in danger of not prevailing; and if you can do that, you are safe; and if you can not do it, you are lost.

The center of character is self-control. The center of self-control is will. The center of will is attention. Now what has all this to do with the body? Just this. The greatest cause of fatigue is attention; that is what tires more than anything else. It takes nervous energy to attend; and the supreme condition, therefore, of power of attention, so far as the body is concerned, is surplus nervous energy. That is the whole problem. Character, self-control, will, attention,—its supreme physical condition, surplus nervous energy. You have no right, then, as a man who means to fight an honest moral fight, to disregard the con-

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ditions through which you are to get surplus nervous energy. That means that you will definitely plan for it, that you are going to see to it that you get sleep enough, to see that you get exercise enough, to see that you attend to all those conditions that have to do with surplus nervous energy; especially that you will avoid every species of excess, particularly emotional excess; and that you will thus honestly before God do what you can to keep in yourself surplus nervous energy. Then you will have a margin of capital, with power to attend, with power to will, with power, therefore, of self-control. The danger of fatigue is, then, manifest. The record of Saturday nights in this world of ours is a tragic record. The problem of Saturday night is already a national problem in Germany because that is the time when men are run down, at their worst physically, and when, therefore, they are most exposed to every temptation.

Now, one can not always control the conditions. There will be times when,

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in spite of all precautions, a man will find himself necessarily and rightly fatigued. Bear in mind that at that time you are to be specially on your guard against sudden onsets of temptation. There is nothing more clear in modern psychology than that the weakest in us, bodily, mental, moral, tends to come out in these moments of fatigue; and, therefore, at these moments we are to guard ourselves with special care against sudden temptation. Sometimes you get up in the morning with a consciousness that you are not at your best, that you are on a low physical plane, that it is going to be hard for you to be what you ought to be that day. That is the day when you can know you have a fight on hand. You may as well prepare for it from the very beginning and watch it to the end.

2. In the second place there are the *mental conditions*. For it is not only true that we are one, body and mind, but it is true that this mind of ours is in a wonderful degree one; and the unity of the mind makes it imperative that there

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should not be lack at any single point. We do not know when we are sapping the foundations. Let me take simply two or three illustrations of the need of heeding the unity of our mind, where many might be taken.

And, first, *you can not play with your memories* and be what you ought to be as moral men. There are men, for example, who like so well to tell a good story that it grows continually on their hands, and they simply get where they can not tell the truth if they want to. You know what happens under such circumstances. These men cannot trust their memory. Now, the power of holding yourself in the presence of temptation often depends upon this: that you are able to recall vividly and with scrupulous accuracy the exact results of your previous experience; and if you have played fast and loose with your memory, it will play you false in your hour of peril.

And note this other danger—*vagueness of thought*. If you allow yourself in it, you are not simply interfering with your

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intellectual growth; you are doing something to sap the foundation of your moral life; for the moral life is made up of a series of volitions that involve the definite choice of definite means to definite ends; and vagueness of thought, vague promises, vague aspirations, do not go well with that kind of direct definite willing that belongs to character.

Especially, in this matter of mental conditions, do not forget the *necessity of power of attention*, and remember that anything that you do at any time really to strengthen your power of concentrated attention is so much added to your moral capital, and anything you do at any time to break down your power of attention is so much further preparation for disaster. If, then, you form the habit of going into your college lectures day after day and dreaming of the ends of the earth while you are there, you are not merely not doing your work as you ought to do it, but you are doing something to break down this power of attention upon which your character depends.

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On the other hand, every time you hold yourself rigorously to the task that is appointed to you for the time, definitely attend to it and carry it through with concentrated attention, you are adding to your power to resist temptation. The human spirit is not a bundle, but an organic unity, and you cannot break down the mental and not affect the moral.

3. Third, we are to consider the conditions of *association*. Here I touch upon what is really the supreme condition of all conditions, and to which, here, I can only give a word. We know but one absolutely certain way to make character, and that is through a surrendering persistent association with those who have such a character as we seek. That is the only way. Character is caught, not ✓ taught. It can not be given in lectures. But if you put yourself side by side with the man that has the spirit that you want, and surrender yourself with openmindedness to the association with him, you will assuredly catch his character. But you can get it in no other way. I shall return

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to this again from a little different point of view.

IV. Let me go on to say in the next place, *remember that self-control*, which is at the very center of character, in spite of its name, *is always positive*, never negative. I think many men have made disastrous mistakes at this point.

I. That means, first, on account of your relation to the body, that you are to *seek positive help from the body*. I think Browning has that in mind in the Rabbi Ben Ezra when he says:—

“ To man propose this test:
Thy body at its best,
How far can that project thy soul
On its lone way ? ”

I do not think that that is a skeptical, cynical question; but I think it is a challenge, “a godlike challenge in the night to our too reluctant wills.” Any man who means to be the man he can be in character, must say, “I am going to get positive help out of this body of mine.”

And if that is to be true, he must make his body the best *instrument* that he can

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make it for the spirit, the very best medium for the spirit to work out through. I suppose that it ought to be true that a series of photographs of a man taken from year to year through his life ought to show that the spirit is increasingly dominating the body, and that the light of the spirit, yea, of the Spirit of God, is increasingly shining out through his face and bearing and mien.

The man who intends to get the most help from his body, will, besides, make his body the very best *foundation* that he knows how to make it for the varied demands of life, broadly laid, deeply laid, and well laid.

He will further see to it that his bodily exercise is a direct aid, as it may be, to intellectual and will training. For all the higher forms of bodily exercise, Romanes tells us, are exercises even more of the higher brain centers than of the muscles. Make your body help your soul; make your body project your soul on its lone way. One can sit down passively before nature and regard it as a limitation if he

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will; or he can say, By the study of the laws of nature I will learn its secrets, and I will make nature serve me. And one can do just that with reference to his body.

Your body, once more, is an immediate *trust* from God for which you are responsible; and in the sight of God, you are to cultivate not only, as one says, "the grace of a blameless body," but you are to cultivate the grace of a positively helpful body.

2. Moreover, if self-control is to be positive, one must remember that *control of the emotions is always indirect*. You can not directly determine whether you shall feel or not. Emotion spontaneously arises in the presence of its object. That you cannot help; but you can direct your attention to another object. The small boy, who is looking through a fence at a patch of watermelons that is not his, can not prevent his mouth from watering, *but he can run*. And you can not keep your emotions from arising in attention to the exciting object, but you can *think of*

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something else. You are not clay in the hands of your circumstances. You were endowed with that which makes you akin to God in His creative power—a will. You can use that will in attending to something other than this object which now works upon your emotions. We are often told to-day that our environment makes us. That is a dangerous half-truth. The whole truth is this: Not your environment makes you, but that part of your environment to which you *attend* makes you. The same environment means very different things to different men. Why? Because different men are attending to different things in it. Let ten men travel over exactly the same route in Europe; do they come back with the same things? By no means. Each man has seen and gotten what he attended to.

You are, then, to control your emotions indirectly through attention to some other object. You may also control your emotions by *acting in the line of those emotions that you think you ought to*

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have. At a given time, for example, a man may be feeling far from cheerful and without courage. This, at least, he can do: he can take a good, long breath, and stiffen up his backbone, and put on the mien of cheer and courage, and so doing, he is far more apt to become cheerful and courageous. There are two sorts of selves in you, a lower and a higher. You can be true to your higher self, or you can be true to your lower self. But you are bound to be true and loyal to your higher self, to the very highest vision that is given you. And one of the sensible, helpful ways to get the emotions you think you ought to have is to act in the line of them. It is to no man's credit to act as illy as he feels. He is rather bound often to act much better than he feels. And so acting, he will be helped to better feeling.

3. In the third place, positive self-control means that you are *to attend*, as I have already implied, *to something else* than the temptation which threatens to engulf you, to replace that tempting

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thought with some other. Do not merely fight a thought. You can not get rid of a thought—this envious, foul, hateful idea that is in your mind—by simply saying, “I won’t think of that another minute.” All the while you are saying this, you are persistently keeping it in mind, you *are* thinking of it. You can get rid of it in just one way: by thinking of something else. You must take the positive way out. The law is simply this—it is a very simple law: You can not have an empty mind, and you can not think of two things with concentrated attention at the same time. As you try to follow this suggestion, it may seem to you that you can think of two things at the same time, but you will be mistaken. The trouble is in lack of concentrated attention. When you seem to be thinking of two things at the same time, you are really thinking first of one thing then of another—letting the thought you ought to hold be broken in on continually by the tempting thought. Only keep your attention steadily fixed upon the considera-

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tion that ought to hold, and it will hold you.

4. And in the fourth place, positive self-control means that we are to heed that principle which the psychologists call the *impulsiveness of consciousness*; that is, that every thought, by its very presence in the mind, tends to pass into act, and will do so, if it is not hindered by the presence of some other thought leading in some other direction. That principle is of very great importance in all our moral and spiritual life. If you are sitting in the parlor of a friend, while you are waiting for him, and there is an open letter on the table, and you are not thinking particularly of what you are doing, but have your eye on the letter, before you know it you will very likely put out your hand and take it up and begin to read it, until you recall yourself with a start. The single idea, unchecked for the moment by any other, was present in the mind; it passed into action almost in spite of you. The teaching of modern psychology, then, is that a thought in

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your mind will pass into act unless it is checked by some other thought; and for our moral life this is strenuous counsel to *withstand beginnings*. Do not dally with the temptation. Do not tarry in the presence of it. Do not do in thought the act to which you are tempted. Avoid the least thought of it. The thinking has its immediate bodily effect, and has its immediate tendency to pass into act. Consequently, when you dally with temptation, when you see how far you can go in imagination without toppling over the precipice of overt sin, what are you doing? You are just heating some brain center, and getting a thought ready to discharge into act. What is it but playing with sparks over a powder mine? nay, putting one's finger on the trigger of a gun and beginning to press it, and yet expecting it not to discharge, when one keeps thinking of the thing he ought not to do, and still hopes to be kept from it. All this is only in line with the Scripture: "Keep thy heart with all diligence"; "Resist the devil, and he

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will flee from you"; "Each man is tempted when he is drawn away by his own lusts and enticed."

But we can withstand the beginnings of evil once more only by conquering this tempting thought that is with us now by attending to some other thought. Anything that supplants the tempting thought will help, if it isn't anything more than running, or saying the multiplication table. There was seen some time ago in the city of Denver a man running as for his life through the suburbs of that city. I suppose an on-looker would have found it rather hard to explain what that man was running for. As a matter of fact, he was fighting for his life with the liquor habit, and the appetite was strong upon him just then. He could not stop to consider or argue the matter at all; he knew just one thing; he must get out of the range of the saloons. It was a help to run. Of course, I need not say, it is far better and far safer than to trust to the trivial supplanting thought, to be able to bring the

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great considerations before you—the highest motives, the inspiring personalities, the greatest person, Christ. In fact, the very difficulty in temptation is to make the consideration which would check the temptation *stay* in mind. It needs the strongest motives and interests. The lesser ones seldom avail. Is there then, no person, the thought of whom will help you in the presence of this temptation—your mother, your child, your wife, your noblest friend, Christ Jesus Himself—that can pluck you out of the power of this temptation? God has rescued many a man in dire temptation through the thought of some others whom he loved, and who loved him. Sometimes, when one feels desperately that he has no care of the consequences for himself, the thought of another who believes in him, who trusts him, though it is only a little child, will deliver him as from the mouth of the pit. And, Christian brethren, let us keep it real to our minds that no one cares so much, loves so much, or trusts us so fully as Christ.

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5. And positive self-control will mean, further, that you are to *resist the evil with the good*; that you are not simply to stop doing bad things because they are bad, but you are to get into the attitude that Spinoza calls the attitude of the freeman and have done with the bad because you have something a great deal better to do. Change your negatives into opposite positives. I have little hope for a man who goes through his life saying, "What is the harm?" What kind of attainment can a man make in his moral life, if his one great question is, What is the harm? and he does not replace that question with this other, What is the very best thing that is now open for me? For next to the bad, the good is the worst enemy of the best. We must try Chalmers's "expulsive power of a new affection."

And that will mean that every temptation we shall take as a *positive opportunity*, and it may be just that. And when next you are under the pressure of strong temptation, remind yourself

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that you have the opportunity now to prove your loving loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. You have your opportunity of conquest, of victory. You have your opportunity for progress in the direction opposite to the temptation. Oh, seize your opportunity! I suppose it is some such thought as this that James has back of his words: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into *manifold* temptations; knowing that the proof of your faith worketh patience"—steadfastness. "And let patience have its perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing." ✓

V. In the next place, remember that, *body and mind, you are made for action.* The body, one of our psychologists tells us, is only a machine for converting stimuli, coming into the brain by the afferent nerves, into reactions, going out by the efferent nerves. And the principle of the impulsiveness of consciousness shows with equal clearness that in mind, too, we are made for action. Every idea tends to pass into action. We are made,

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then, for action. This is the real justification of the far slower methods of the laboratory and seminar in modern education. One must do, to know. It is not enough passively to receive an idea; if it is really to be yours, you must express it in some way, you must put it into act. Your idea or ideal is not fully yours until you have expressed it. The resulting law for character is clear and unmistakable. *That which is not expressed dies.* If you would kill an idea, deny it absolutely all expression; it will die. On the other hand, if you have an idea that you wish to live, to be a reality, you must express it. You may not rest content with fine thoughts, and fancies, and sentiments, and feelings, and aspirations. If you are not willing to become mere sentimentalists, you must put them into act. Some of us have been in the habit of speaking of the danger from the theater and from novel reading in arousing emotions and sentiments that we simply allow idly to be dissipated. We need to remind ourselves that the same

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law holds for emotion and sentiment, however aroused, whether by theater, or novel, or concert, or lecture, or sermon. If you have been stirred to moral feeling in any way as you prize your moral life, see to it that your feeling gets some real and tangible expression ; put it into act.

This principle of expression has this further application of central importance. Christ wishes to save you into His own life of ministering, self-sacrificing love.

The character into which you must come, then, is that of this self-sacrificing love. But you cannot live the life of love alone. If you are really to love, you must show it, you must express it ; you must yourself enter upon some ministering, some redeeming activity, of your own for another. You can, then, make no hopeful fight for your own character, without beginning at once a service for others. In some of our asylums, I am told, some of the less insane are set to care for cases a little more serious ; and the men find in this responsibility for others, not only distraction of attention from their

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own cases, but a constant strong motive to self-control, and so best win back their own sanity. In like manner he will be most surely redeemed into the loving character, who enters most heartily himself into loving service for others, into real redeeming work. This is no doubt one of the chief keeping forces for the converts in city mission work.

VI. And, finally, *the ease with which under temptation you can direct attention to the highest motives will depend upon your previous interests and habits of thought.* Consequently every bit of time that a man spends in the positive pursuit of higher things, in the presence of the best things, getting *habituated* to them, staying persistently above all in the atmosphere of the life of Jesus Christ—every bit of time so spent is positive preparation for temptation. Give the best persistently a chance at you. The evil wrought in a man's imagination by a single vile story may well illustrate the power that the persistent good may have. Christ's apt use of the Scripture in His

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temptations shows that there had been habitually deep, earnest dwelling on the best things, that stands Him now instead. It is no superficial quoting that He does. So the Spirit of God, let us be sure, will use with us in temptation that part of His Word that we have earnestly and prayerfully put beforehand into our thought and life. That is the sword of the Spirit in temptation. The habitual, earnest use of the Bible, thus, not only gives God a chance at us at the time of our study, but also gives later help. It is one of our most practicable ways of associating with Christ. In the light of the principles we are now considering, Paul's counsel to the Philippians, which seems at first quite lacking in urgency, gets its full justification: "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, *think* on these

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things." Give them *habitually* a place in your thought, and it will be enough. The rest will care for itself. The mind readily recurs to its habitual associations.

And so we return once more to that which is the foundation of all, and the one unfailing way to character—*persistent association with Christ*. The only effective road to character we know is through personal association with the best. The dynamic is finally personal always; in it God graciously allows the lesser personalities, down to the latest Christian, to share; but the fully adequate power for the production of the highest character is only in the greatest person, Christ. Only as men put themselves persistently, habitually, in His presence is character secured. And a man is to do this, not vaguely and with mere mystical emotion, but with earnest, intelligent determination to know with thoroughness and appreciation the earthly historical manifestation of God in Christ—to become saturated with the spirit and teaching of Jesus until he has

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caught his *convictions* of God and the spiritual world, and has come to share his *feeling* toward God and man, and has taken his *purposes* of the Kingdom upon him. Only so, do we prove ourselves real learners of Christ; only so, are we faithfully fulfilling the conditions through which we may abide in Christ and Christ in us, and through which the Spirit may take the things of Christ and show them unto us. Christ means, so, personally to deliver us. And a man may count, as upon the very laws of the universe, upon the certain results of persistent association with Christ. Under temptation one needs the strongest motives. Now the most powerful forces in life are personal; and of all personal relations, the incomparable one—that which gives meaning and value to all the rest, that which has the capacity to become for any man who enters heartily upon it the mastering power of his life—is the relation to God in Jesus Christ. Here and here alone is the greatest dynamic for character and life; and so Christ says, “Abide in Me

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and I in you.” “Apart from Me ye can do nothing.”

Let me summarize briefly a number of other considerations.

I. In the first place, *call the temptation by its right name*. And upon this point hear one of our great American psychologists, Professor William James, of Harvard University:—

“Where, however, the right conception is an anti-impulsive one, the whole intellectual ingenuity of the man usually goes to work to crowd it out of sight, and to find for the emergency names by the help of which the dispositions of the moment may sound sanctified, and self or passion may reign unchecked. How many excuses does the drunkard find when each new temptation comes! It is a new brand of liquor which the interests of intellectual culture in such matters oblige him to taste; moreover it is poured out and it is a sin to waste it; also others are drinking and it would be churlishness to refuse. Or it is but to enable him to sleep, or just to get through this job of work; or it isn’t drinking, it is because he feels so cold; or it’s Christmas day; or it

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is a means of stimulating him to make a more powerful resolution in favor of abstinence than he has hitherto made; or it is just this once, and once does not count, etc., etc.,—ad libitum—it is in fact, anything you like except *being a drunkard.*”—You would not believe that a man could offer such excuses to himself, even if a psychologist did say it, if you had not been guilty of just such unspeakable folly yourself with reference to your own temptations.—“*That* is the conception that will not stay before the poor soul’s attention. But if he once gets able to pick out that way of conceiving from all the other possible ways of conceiving the various opportunities which occur, if through thick and thin he holds to it that this is being a drunkard and is nothing else, he is not likely to remain one long. The effort by which he succeeds in keeping the right *name* unwaveringly present to his mind proves to be his saving moral act.”

And so with reference to your temptations. Have you been doing your studying, for example, in a way that you know is not right? Then see to it yourself. Call it by the right name.

The Fight

Do not call it "ponying," and do not call it anything else but lying, living a lie. There are many other things in your college life and in all living to which you can apply the same line of thought. Call the temptation by its right name.

2. In the second place, learn yourself, and yet without undue introspection. You can not go by others. The fact that a thing is safe for another man does not prove that it is safe for you. Reduce the occasions of temptation to a minimum.

3. In the third place, fill your time with positive service and good. Do not drift. Have *definite* things on hand to do.

4. Remember, in the fourth place, the promise of God that you shall not be tempted above that you are able. Do not make the miserable weakling's excuse, that you can not help it. You can help it. "God is *faithful*, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape." And I think I may appeal

for Character

to the consciousness of every man before me that, when under strenuous temptation he has still yielded, as he looks back upon it, he can see that there was a certain point when God, as it were, held the temptation in lull and showed him a clear way out and he refused to take it.

5. And lay solemnly to heart that other counsel of Paul: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." Few things are so stumbling as our conceit of ourselves. Keep, I pray you, the sense of constant dependence; apart from Christ you can do nothing.

6. And next, forget the things which are behind. It may be failure or it may be success that lies back of you; in any case we are not to live in the past; forget the things that are behind. Press forward. Discouragement is of the devil. Sometimes a man is likely to feel that he is in a particularly religious frame of mind when he is discouraged. Nevertheless, discouragement is of the devil. Nobody profits by your discouragement but the forces of evil.

The Fight

7. If you do fall, go back at *once* to Christ. Here, again, I think many of us are often misled. We think that it is not quite respectable and fairly Christian to go right back to Christ; and so we make ourselves miserable for three or four days and then go back, and all the time we were only getting worse. If you fall under temptation, go back at once to Christ.

8. And if you even doubt whether you are a Christian at all, do not debate it, but be one now. That is the whole of the matter, so far as you are concerned.

9. And remember that other golden word of Cecil's: "Duties are ours; events are God's." You are not responsible for the results; you are responsible for the duties. Leave the rest with God. Do not carry His burden.

10. And do not forget, finally, the help of suffering. You will come to praise God that at certain times he put you in fiery trial. "Ye have not yet resisted," the writer of the Hebrews says, "unto blood striving against sin." And, sometimes,

for Character

it seems as if it were only through suffering that some temptation loses its power over us. "Forasmuch then as Christ suffered in the flesh, arm ye yourselves also with the same mind."

Christian brethren, this is life—temptation, trial, struggle, conflict, possible victory—the strenuous life. You can not cowardly give it up. And you need all the help you can have, and the only adequate help is Jesus Christ. If there is one man in history who above all other men, I think, may be called a man of mighty will, it is the apostle Paul; certainly he was no weakling; but it was this man of mighty will who said, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" He found but one deliverer: "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

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